

# Manzanar

Manzanar National Historic Site  
California

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



*"We had about one week to dispose of what we owned, except what we could pack and carry for our departure by bus...for Manzanar."*

William Hohri

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941, led the United States into World War II and radically changed the lives of 120,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry living in the United States. The attack intensified racial prejudices and led to fear of potential sabotage and espionage by Japanese Americans among some in the government, military, news media, and public. In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the Secretary of War to establish Military Areas and to remove from those areas anyone who might threaten the war effort. Without due process, the government gave everyone of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast only days to decide what to do with their houses,

farms, businesses, and other possessions. Most families sold their belongings at a significant loss. Some rented their properties to neighbors. Others left possessions with friends or religious groups. Some abandoned their property. They did not know where they were going or for how long. Each family was assigned an identification number and loaded into cars, buses, trucks, and trains, taking only what they could carry. Japanese Americans were transported under military guard to 17 temporary assembly centers located at racetracks, fairgrounds, and similar facilities in Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona. Then they were moved to one of 10 hastily built relocation centers. By November 1942 the relocation was complete.



DOROTHEA LANGE, 1941, NATIONAL ARCHIVES

A sand and dust storm blows across Manzanar. DOROTHEA LANGE, 1942, NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Facing uncertain futures, a man and his grandson hold onto each other.



DOROTHEA LANGE, 1942, NATIONAL ARCHIVES



Internees clear land for an agricultural project.

DOROTHEA LANGE, 1942, NATIONAL ARCHIVES



PHOTO: NATIONAL JAPANESE AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY; MEDAL: SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Pfc. Munemori



A soldier visits his family confined at Manzanar. The banner indicated a family member serving in the military.



SEATTLE POST INTELLIGENCER, 1942, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
Posted evacuation procedures notify Japanese Americans of where they should assemble and what they should bring. Tags identify individuals and belongings.

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DOROTHEA LANGE, 1942, THE BANCROFT LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

## Life at Manzanar

Ten war relocation centers were built in remote deserts, plains, and swamps of seven states; Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming. Manzanar, located in the Owens Valley of California between the Sierra Nevada on the west and the Inyo mountains on the east, was typical in many ways of the 10 camps.

About two-thirds of all Japanese Americans interned at Manzanar were American citizens by birth. The remainder were aliens, many of whom had lived in the United States for decades, but who, by law, were denied citizenship.

The first Japanese Americans to arrive at Manzanar, in March 1942, were men and women who volunteered to help build the camp. On June 1 the War Relocation Authority (WRA) took over operation of Manzanar from the U.S. Army.

The 500-acre housing section was surrounded by barbed wire and eight guard towers with searchlights and patrolled by military police. Outside the fence, military police housing, a reservoir, a sewage treatment plant, and agricultural fields occupied the remaining 5,500 acres. By September 1942 more than 10,000 Japanese Americans were crowded into 504 barracks organized into 36 blocks. There

was little or no privacy in the barracks—and not much outside. The 200 to 400 people living in each block, consisting of 14 barracks each divided into four rooms, shared men's and women's toilets and showers, a laundry room, and a mess hall. Any combination of eight individuals was allotted a 20-by-25-foot room. An oil stove, a single hanging light bulb, cots, blankets, and mattresses filled with straw were the only furnishings provided.

Coming from Los Angeles and other communities in California and Washington, Manzanar's internees were unaccustomed to the harsh desert environment. Summer temperatures soared as high as 110°F. In winter, temperatures frequently plunged below freezing.

Throughout the year strong winds swept through the valley, often blanketing the camp with dust and sand. Internees covered knotholes in the floors with tin can lids, but dust continued to blow in between the floorboards until linoleum was installed in late 1942.

## Overcoming Adversity

Internees attempted to make the best of a bad situation. The WRA formed an advisory council of internee-elected block managers. Internees established churches, temples, and boys and girls clubs. They developed sports, music, dance, and other recreational programs; built gardens and ponds; and published a newspaper, the *Manzanar Free Press*.

Most internees worked in the camp. They dug irrigation canals and ditches, tended acres of fruits and vegetables, and raised chickens, hogs, and cattle. They made clothes and furniture for themselves and camouflage netting and experimental rubber for the

military. They served as mess hall workers, doctors, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and teachers.

Professionals were paid \$19 per month, skilled workers received \$16, and non-skilled workers got \$12. Many pooled their resources and created a consumer cooperative that published the *Manzanar Free Press* and operated a general store, beauty parlor, barbershop, and bank.

*"...one of the hardest things to endure was the communal latrines, with no partitions; and showers with no stalls."*

—Rosie Kakuuchi

## Loyalty and Service

About 5,000 Japanese Americans were serving in the U.S. Army when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The U.S. military soon called for another 5,000 volunteers from the mainland and

Hawaii. In January 1942, however, the Selective Service reclassified Japanese Americans as "enemy aliens" and stopped drafting them.

Emotions were intense during 1942 as the United States entered the war and Japanese Americans were moved to the relocation centers. Various protests and disturbances occurred at some centers over political differences, wages, and rumors of informers and black marketing. At Manzanar two people were killed and 10 were wounded by military police during the Manzanar Riot in December 1942.

Tensions intensified in 1943 when the government required internees to answer a "loyalty questionnaire." They were asked if they would serve in combat and if they would swear unqualified allegiance to the United States. Some older internees answered "no" because they were not

## Medal of Honor Winner

Pfc. Sadao S. Munemori, shown above, whose mother and siblings were interned at Manzanar, joined the U.S. Army one month before Pearl Harbor. After being trained in military intelligence, Munemori decided to join the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. A month before the war in Europe ended, Munemori was killed when he threw himself on a grenade in Italy to spare fellow soldiers. He was the only Japanese American to be awarded the Medal of Honor during World War II.

allowed to become U.S. citizens. Others refused to serve while their families were behind barbed wire. Those who answered "yes" were considered "loyal" and became eligible for indefinite leave outside the West Coast military areas. Those who answered "no" were sent to a segregation center at Tule Lake, Calif.

In January 1944 the draft was reinstated for Japanese Americans. Most of those who were drafted or volunteered joined the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Combined with the 100th Infantry Battalion of the Hawaiian Territorial Guard, the 442nd fought with distinction in North Africa, France, and Italy. With 9,846 casualties, the 100th/442nd had the highest casualty rate and was the most highly decorated Army unit for its size and length of service. Nearly 26,000 Japanese Americans served in the U.S. military during World War II.

## Chronology

**1869** First known Japanese immigrants to U.S. settle near Sacramento.

**1913** Alien Land Law prohibits Japanese aliens from owning land in California and imposes a three-year limit on leasing of land.

**1924** Immigration Exclusion Act halts Japanese immigration to U.S.

**1941** U.S. enters World War II after Pearl Harbor attack Dec. 7.

**1942** Executive Order 9066 of Feb. 19 authorizes relocation and/or internment of anyone who might threaten the U.S. war effort.



**1943** U.S. Army forms 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated unit for Japanese Americans that serves with 100th Infantry Battalion in Europe.

**1944** Supreme Court upholds constitutionality of evacuation based solely on national ancestry while separately ruling that loyal citizens cannot be held against their will.

**1945** World War II ends with Japan's surrender Aug. 14. Manzanar War Relocation Center closes Nov. 21.

**1952** Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act allows Japanese aliens to become naturalized citizens.

**1972** Manzanar designated a California Registered Historical Landmark.

**1988** U.S. Civil Liberties Act grants a \$20,000 payment and an apology to 82,000 former internees.

**1992** Manzanar National Historic Site established March 3.

**2001** Minidoka Internment National Monument designated Jan. 17 in Idaho. National Japanese American Memorial dedicated June 29 in Washington, D.C.

**2004** Manzanar National Historic Site Interpretive Center opens April 24.



American soldiers of the 442nd Central Postal Directory. MUSSEY, SIGNAL CORPS, 1944, NATIONAL ARCHIVES